July 7th, 2020

Senator Wyden
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Gillibrand
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Casey
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Brown
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Hirono
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Jackson Lee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Kuster
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Eshoo
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Hastings
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Carson
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Haaland
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Castor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Norton
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Wyden, Gillibrand, Casey, Brown, and Hirono and Representatives Eshoo, Hastings, Carson, Kuster, Haaland, Norton, Caston, and Jackson Lee:

The undersigned members of the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation[1] (Prevention Coalition) and other organizations thank you for your attention to child sexual abuse and exploitation through the Invest in Child Safety Act. This investment in child protection is critical as the proliferation and extent of child sexual abuse and exploitation come to light in the public consciousness. As this work advances, prevention must be addressed in its own right and prioritized with adequate investment.

Child sexual abuse and assault currently affect 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys in the United States with those affected often experiencing long lasting negative effects; statistics that are likely on the lower

[1] The views and information provided in materials and products developed for or disseminated by the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation do not necessarily represent the opinions of the individual members or organizations that make up the Prevention Coalition.

bounds due to vast underreporting.[2] The media has drawn vital attention to these issues as the New York Times has highlighted the increase of child sexually abusive imagery online. In the wake of the pandemic, we're seeing a stark rise in levels of sexual abuse while typical methods of prevention and intervention are interrupted.

Sexual abuse is preventable. To thwart its continuation, prevention must be prioritized with investment, i.e., by funding training for adults and education for young people on the skills to understand body touching boundaries, to recognize violations of those boundaries, and to have strategies to respond when those boundaries are violated, as well as by reducing the development of sexually harmful behaviors early, such as by providing young people increased access to SEL. Research has shown that evidence-based programs that address off-line harmful behaviors are impactful for addressing online safety as well.[3]

We commend the proposed investment in grants to support evidence-based programs and services to prevent child sexual exploitation, grants for school-based mental health service providers, and for trainings for school-based mental health providers to detect cases of child sexual exploitation. All of these allow for prevention and early intervention. Furthermore, the mandated study to identify risk factors of child sexual exploitation, as well as to identify and evaluate promising child sexual exploitation prevention services and programs, is sorely needed and will strengthen efforts in the field.

We believe the Office to Enforce and Protect Against Child Sexual Exploitation (the Office) will have a vital role to play in this space. We urge that the Office be required to prioritize and invest in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Thank you for the timely and much-needed introduction of the Invest in Child Safety Act. Please feel free to contact Jordan Posamentier, President of the Prevention Coalition and Director of Policy & Advocacy at Committee for Children, at jposamentier@cfchildren.org should you have any questions or wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,

National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Abuse Prevention Solutions, LLC

Chicago Children's Advocacy Center

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Advocacy Institute

Committee for Children

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[2] Finkelhor, D., Shattuck, A., Turner, H. A., & Hamby, S. L. (2014). The lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual assault assessed in late adolescence. Journal of Adolescent Health, 55(3), 329–333. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.12.026

[3] Finkelhor, D., Walsh, K., Jones, L., Mitchell, K., & Collier, A. (2020). Youth Internet Safety Education: Aligning Programs With the Evidence Base. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 1-15. doi://10.1177/1524838020916257

Hannah Fraley, Ph.D., RN, CNE, CPH, Assistant Professor, California State Uiversity, Fullerton

Keith L Kaufman, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, Portland State University

KidSafe Foundation

MassKids and the Enough Abuse Campaign

NASW

National Family Support Network

National Foundation to End Child Abuse and Neglect

Ray E. Helfer Society

Stop It Now!